

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/7318435) at
<http://download.archiveofourown.org/works/7318435>.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	F/F , Gen
Fandom:	Overwatch (Video Game)
Relationship:	Fareeha "Pharah" Amari/Angela "Mercy" Ziegler
Character:	Angela "Mercy" Ziegler , Fareeha "Pharah" Amari , Winston (Overwatch)
Additional Tags:	Romance , War , Second Omnic Crisis
Series:	Part 2 of When We Start Over
Stats:	Published: 2016-06-27 Completed: 2016-09-10 Chapters: 5/5 Words: 15133

To Bring Hope

by [Zainir](#)

Summary

Angela has convinced Fareeha to leave HSI. With the world in chaos and Overwatch still inactive, the pair travel to try and help who they can. Their first trip lands them in Russia, facing the front lines of the Second Omnic Crisis.

[Feel free to drop a comment with questions or comments or even if you just see I made a mistake!]

Chapter 1

Fareeha felt naked as the truck settled down on the quay. She found herself unarmed, unarmored, and in the dark about what they were even doing. Angela had been quiet about it. Fareeha had trust in her, but that didn't make it easier when she got only vague answers as they traveled. They'd left behind the brightness of London earlier that day. This far down the river, the docks sat forgotten and abandoned. Angela looked over and offered a reassuring smile. Fareeha's own smile was more nervous but she followed Angela out of the truck to the nearby warehouse

The air smelled like rotten fish and rusting metal. A light above the door was on but old and half burnt out. It cast a sickly, flickering yellow light down across the concrete. Angela didn't hesitate, though. The door moved with surprising silence on its hinges when she opened. Fareeha followed her inside and hovered close. She might be certain this was safe, but Fareeha would not let anything happen if she could help it. Just in case.

A light flickered to life and Angela stopped outside the circle of illumination. She lay one hand on Fareeha's arm to stay her. Fareeha could see a figure moving across from them, a large shadow in the gloom.

"Is that you, Mercy?" the shape asked in a low, booming voice.

"Apologies for our lateness. We got held up at the airport," Angela said as she stepped into the light.

Despite her nerves, Fareeha marveled at Angela. She could look so lovely even in such dingy surroundings. Her hair flashed like molten gold that poured down over her shoulders in waves. She wore a pale blue t-shirt to match her eyes, jeans, and sneakers. Yet she seemed just as confident and assured as if she were wearing a gown or a suit or even armor. Fareeha stepped up to join her, feeling much less sure. She had pulled her long, black hair up in a ponytail. She wore a hoodie over her own gray shirt heavy boots to keep off the unfamiliar wet chill she had found in England. The figure who stepped up across from them wore a heavy suit of armor that encased almost his entire body.

That was oddly the first thing Fareeha noticed. Then she realized the figure was also a massive gorilla. She tensed in surprise but Angela remained calm. She touched her fingertips to Fareeha's arm in reassurance. It took her a moment before she remembered. She knew this gorilla.

"Winston?" she asked.

"Ah, Miss Amari, how wonderful to meet you. Or, I suppose, meet you again," he said with a soft chuckle. He offered her a smile that was both reassuring but awkward across his non-human face. "Though you were quite little the last time we saw each other in person."

"I am afraid I remember you more from stories and holovids," Fareeha said. She offered a small apologetic smile of her own.

"Of course, of course. It was a long time ago. You've done so much since then. When Angela said she was bringing you along, I brushed up on how far you've come. Your mother would have been so proud of you."

Cold lanced through Fareeha's chest at that. She knew he had meant well, a compliment at the years of work she had put in. He likely didn't even know. She opened her mouth but Angela cleared her throat before she could respond.

“You realize what we are doing here is illegal, yes?” Angela asked Winston, edging forward in front of Fareeha.

He let out a heavy, weary sigh that shook his shoulders. “I know. I know, believe me. But how long can we just sit by and do nothing?”

“Not all of us have been doing nothing, Winston.”

“And not all of us can so easily return to working within normal society, Angela.”

Her expression softened. “I understand. And I imagine there are more than a few who will jump at the chance to return. Lena and Reinhardt, for certain. But it is asking a great deal of others, myself included.”

“You helped when I asked. You went to check on potential recruits and returns, including Miss Amari here.”

“Yes and I am glad that I did,” Angela said, glancing back at Fareeha with a smile, “We helped so many, back then. It wasn’t always the way I wanted, but I still miss the capability we had. And, yes, I would like to see us be able to help again but I also cannot put myself in danger of being arrested. I will not give up my own ability to help.”

Winston nodded slowly and sat down, plucking his glasses off his face. He polished them as Angela stepped closer and laid a hand on his shoulder. Sitting as he was, they were almost the same height though he completely dwarfed her in sheer bulk. Fareeha watched with curiosity, unsure what to add to their conversation. She fidgeted with the zipper on her hoodie.

“I will do what I can, Winston, but I cannot declare myself a part of Overwatch. At least not until we’re certain we can do it safely,” Angela said in a gentle tone. “In the meantime, I will offer my advice moving forward and assist when I can.”

“That is more than I could really ask of you, Angela. Thank you,” he said with a smile, patting his huge hand over her smaller one.

“My first bit of advice would be to try and gather up the more...vocal members and try to reign them in a little. Reinhardt, especially.” She paused and chuckled to herself, shaking her head. “You know how that man is. Soon he’ll be shouting from the mountains that Overwatch is back.”

Winston grunted, a sound somewhere between a short, sharp laugh and sigh. “You’re right about that. I’m going to meet him soon for that reason. What about Miss Amari here, I wonder?”

“You are welcome to try and recruit her, though I also have an offer for her. I could certainly do with a bodyguard during my next trip.”

Fareeha blinked several times in surprise.

“I ah...recruit me? Bodyguard? I feel on the spot now,” she said, looking between the two before she let out a sigh. “Forgive me, Winston. I had always dreamed of joining Overwatch and of being a part of that.” She paused for a moment. “But I feel I owe my loyalty to Doctor Ziegler for the moment. Perhaps, once things are more stable, I can truly join.”

“Yes, I rather suspected that would be your answer,” Winston said with a soft chuckle. Fareeha could hear the disappointment just beneath. “It rather explains the order for the suit, though.”

“What suit?” Fareeha asked, furrowing her brows.

“I planned ahead,” Angela said with a smile.

Winston stood and walked out of the ring of light a moment, returning with a large crate on a dolly. He wrenched the lid off with nothing but his hand. Inside was a brand new Raptora suit, painted bright blue, alongside a new rocket launcher. Fareeha gasped and reached in, running a finger across the helmet.

“I knew you’d have to leave yours behind, so I asked Winston to find an old friend of ours to make you a new one. I can’t exactly have my bodyguard unarmed, can I?”

“And what a nightmare it was dealing with our old friend,” Winston said gruffly. “He’s still after your Valkyrie suit, you know. He wants to upgrade it.”

“I know what his upgrades involve and he will never get the chance,” Angela said. her tone was sharp before she offered Winston a smile. “I thank you. I owe you for this.”

“It is less what you owe me and more what Torbjörn believes you owe him,” Winston said. He replaced the top of the crate and hammered it back on with a quick blow of his massive fist. “I think we’ve lingered long enough, however.”

They left the warehouse together, Winston wheeling the dolly out behind him. He loaded the heavy crate into the truck like it weighed nothing. The truck sank with the extra weight and the anti-grav repulsors strained to keep it level. Angela pulled a small memory drive from her pocket and offered it over.

“So you will know how to contact me. And know where we are,” she explained as she slipped into the driver’s seat.

“Be safe, Angela,” Winston said, concern in his eyes as he looked in through the window. “And you keep her that way, Miss Amari. And yourself as well.”

“I promise I will,” Fareeha said with a smile and a sharp nod.

Angela wiggled her fingers in a farewell wave before she started the truck and shifted into lift. It rose off the ground, slow and struggling at first, but it managed until she could angle it out across the river. She turned it toward the coast.

“Where are we going that you need me as a bodyguard?” Fareeha asked later, after the last lights of the city had vanished behind them.

“Oh, right, I didn’t mention. We’re going to Russia.”

Fareeha shivered just at the thought. “What’s in Russia?”

Angela smiled. “People to help.”

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for [notes](#)

Fareeha watched with a sort of odd fascination as Angela pulled yet another bag of snacks from her pack. She should have been used to it by now. But every time she watched Angela devour some new secret stash of food, she felt a strange sort of awe. Angela was a small woman, a few inches shorter than Fareeha and slender as well, but she ate like a giant. Fareeha pulled a small notepad and pen from her bag and made a note.

“What was that?” Angela asked, looking up from her book at the sound.

“Hm?”

“You wrote something. What did you write?”

Fareeha's dark eyes met Angela's blue ones for a moment before she flicked her gaze down. Angela looked down at the bag of trail mix she had her hand buried in before her cheeks flushed light pink.

“Are you keeping track of my food?” she asked, pursing her lips in a pout.

“Six bags of trail mix, four bags of jerky, two bowls of fruit salad. Cake enough for three people and a box of cookies. And that jar of olives yesterday,” Fareeha read from her list. A smile played at her lips. “And that isn't even including actual meals. We've been on the train for five days.”

Angela blushed darker. “I've just been very hungry.”

“I do not mean to embarrass you,” Fareeha said gently. She reached over to pat Angela's hand. “I am just...I don't know. Impressed? Curious? How can you eat so much and stay as skinny as you are?”

Angela shifted in her seat, not quite meeting Fareeha's gaze. She reached down for her trail mix but stopped herself. Fareeha watched with a small frown before she scooted forward on her seat across from Angela. She reached down to grab a handful of the snacks herself and popped a few raisins into her mouth. Angela hesitated a moment before she began to eat as well.

“It's a long story,” she said after a few moments.

“We're on this train for another week,” Fareeha said with a chuckle, “I believe we have time.”

Angela didn't answer, popping peanuts into her mouth with a thoughtful expression instead. Fareeha picked up her computer tablet. Holding the thin bit of plastic and metal in her lap, she flicked through it to reopen her book. She wouldn't press, of course. Angela could speak if she wanted. She had plenty of books to read on the way to Krasnoyarsk.

“What do you know of my research?” Angela asked finally, after the silence had drawn out for several minutes.

“Not as much as I'd like,” Fareeha admitted. She had read a few of the files on Angela and her research shortly after they had met. The research had been too high level for her to understand completely. “I know you were a renowned surgeon, though. Before you joined Overwatch.”

"I was. In Switzerland," Angela said as she slipped from her seat, moving to settle next to Fareeha. She leaned in close with her head on Fareeha's shoulder. "I did wonderful things there and helped so many people. But I was far, far away from anyone who actually needed my help."

"So you joined Overwatch?" Fareeha asked as she slipped an arm around Angela's shoulders.

"Hm, no, not then. They didn't know I existed and so had no reason to offer me a position. I started to research nanobiology," Angela said. She took Fareeha's hand in her own, enjoying the feel of the rough callouses against her skin.

"Nanobiology?"

"Combining nanotech with medicine. It was difficult, but I was able to develop a few types of nanomachines that can repair bodily damage. Instead of waiting at a hospital for patients, I can deliver healing to those who need it most," Angela said. It was clear she was doing her best to keep the topic simple. "But during my original trials, I...may have experimented on myself a little."

"Angela, you cannot be serious. Why?"

Fareeha looked down at her with shock and concern and all Angela could do was smile sheepishly back up at her. She cuddled in closer, hoping the extra affection might soften that sharp look. It helped, a little.

"I needed to test and I was...impatient. I got overconfident," Angela said, "My current Caduceus Staff uses a more advanced version. There's a housing inside that helps create these nanomachines. And they stop functioning within minutes. It is constantly creating more. The ones I tested on myself stop functioning the same, but the housing that creates them is me."

Fareeha frowned in thought. "I'm not sure I understand."

"There is, for lack of a better word, a colony of these machines living inside me. What I tested on myself creates more of them, using materials in my body. In this case, the food I eat. So I eat, but I don't get all of it."

"Do they hurt you?" Fareeha asked rather more sharply than she intended.

She reached down and laid her hand on Angela's stomach, as if to feel these invisible machines inside her. Angela couldn't help but chuckle softly. She leaned up and pressed a soft kiss to Fareeha's lips. After a moment, she returned it, her full lips moving against Angela's as she relaxed.

"No, they don't hurt aside from making me hungry," Angela said when they broke apart again. "In fact, they help me a good deal. Any time I get injured, they can repair the damage almost immediately. And, some times, I can pass them on."

"Pass them on how?"

"With a kiss," Angela said as she winked.

Fareeha touched her fingers to her lips, her brows furrowing in concern. "I have them?"

"For a few minutes and then they will die."

Angela reached up and took Fareeha's hand away from her mouth. She brought it down to her own so she could place light kisses on the rough, calloused fingertips. Fareeha smiled and brushed her hand against Angela's cheek.

“So, I don’t suppose you’d care to go with me to the dining car?” Angela asked with a crooked smirk, “I’m starving.”

The rest of the trip passed as quietly as the start, but Fareeha was more than happy to get off. At least she was until she got off and saw the snow. It blanketed the town, a soft white fluff that sparkled in the sun where it was untouched. The rest of it was melting to a mix of black slush and refreezing into dirty ice. She started to shiver. Just looking at it made her cold despite the heavy coat and boots and hat and gloves and all the other little things. Angela had insisted on buying her a wardrobe before they left. She was so thankful for that she wasn't sure it was possible to put into words.

“Is this your first time seeing snow?”

Fareeha shook her head. She’d traveled quite a lot for Helix Security International. She was a model employee that they could show off at events and conferences, a kind of ambassador. She’d seen snow fall from the sky and drift along roads, usually from inside a hotel she never had to leave. She’d seen it on the way here too, but outside the warm snugness of the train.

“There’s so much,” she finally said, her breath misting in the air.

“And there will be more before we are done. This is just the beginning,” Angela said. A weariness at the prospect crept into her voice.

They collected their belongings off the train to be loaded into a waiting military truck. The men had been polite enough at first. Angela had contacted them before they left London. When they saw the massive crate with Fareeha's Raptora suit, they were quick to start cursing. Angela had seemingly failed to mention the bulk of their cargo. She also seemed to find it amusing.

While they worked, Fareeha wandered along the open station platform. The walls were covered in posters covered in words she couldn’t read. She knew recruitment posters when she saw them, though. They were an odd mix of hopeful and intimidating. Massive piloted robots dominated them, towering over buildings and soldiers in the background. They looked uncomfortably like omnics but they were the great hope of Russia. The Svyatogor were well known, even to Fareeha all the way in Egypt.

Even so, many of those posters were hidden behind new ones. More personal and often less sleek, they pictured a huge woman with a shock of neon pink hair. In a few, she posed heroically with a massive weapon of a sort Fareeha had never seen. In others, she looked relaxed and casual, flexing and with a bright smile. It was a curious direction for propaganda, Fareeha felt. Perhaps it was easier to recruit with a large, beautiful woman instead of an even larger robot.

They all clambered into the truck once the soldiers had finished loading it up with supplies. The streets were all but empty and they stayed low to the ground despite the anti-grav systems.

“They’ll shoot us down if we go too high. They have cannons outside town that take down anything flying,” one of the soldiers explained.

She frowned and sat in silence the rest of the way, one hand reaching over to find Angela’s. She had almost forgotten the reason they had come out so far, but it was obvious the further they drove. Half destroyed trucks dotted the road. Buildings with damaged roofs and broken walls became more common the further they traveled away from the train depot. Finally, the wreckage of disabled omnics began appearing. Bastion units for the most part, with a few larger more tank-like omnics mixed in.

“When was the last attack?” Fareeha asked.

“Three weeks,” the soldier said as he turned in the seat to look back at her. He was young but looked more tired, more worn than Fareeha could believe. “We pushed them back hard here so they turned down south to try and get around.”

“Were there many casualties?” Angela asked.

The man nodded solemnly. “Yes. From our forces and from civilians who had not evacuated.”

Angela looked shocked and tightened her hold on Fareeha’s hand. “There are still civilians out here?”

“Not as many. We have forced most to evacuate, but the area is large and many we cannot get to. Most come through here. We are hoping you can help us, Miss Mercy.”

“I will do everything I can,” she said, smiling warmly. The soldier looked relieved as he turned back around.

The makeshift hospital was in a school cafeteria behind the defensive line. The real hospital had been destroyed early on, they were told. They had tried moving the refugee processing and the medical staff further into the city. During one of the attacks, the omnic had snuck around and attacked. With too few soldiers to guard, many civilians had died. Splitting their forces had resulted in more deaths on the front as well. Fareeha wasn’t sure this was a better option, but the group didn’t know that there was one. They had been left to their own devices for the most part while those in charge tried to press back the omnic forces. They were lucky to get the supplies they needed.

“This is why I wanted us to come out here,” Angela said as she unpacked her gear, “These people need help. This is why I joined Overwatch, did all my research.”

“What can I do?” Fareeha asked, feeling uncertain.

“Put your armor on. You should be able to destroy the omnic cannons outside of the city,” Angela said. She led Fareeha through the field hospital, her coat swishing around her. “And just try to be seen. It’ll help morale. If we get attacked, you have experience against omnic, right? Hopefully you won’t be needed much, though.”

Fareeha nodded and went to find a place to change into her suit. The sooner she could make an impression here, the better for everyone. It felt like they needed even the smallest of wins.

The air was cold as Fareeha rocketed up through it, even through her armor. She ignored it, though. This was where she was most comfortable anymore, no matter the temperature. Well, here in the sky and in Angela’s arms. She couldn’t do much good there though.

A sharp beeping echoed through her helmet as the defense systems detected an attack. She swerved sharply to the left, angling herself downward as she let a flare shoot from the back of her suit. The incoming missile swerved toward the flare and exploded with a heavy thud. The shockwave rattled Fareeha’s teeth in her head. They weren’t screwing around with their attacks, that was for certain. A direct hit from that would chew through her armor like it was paper. When the next warning came in, she was ready for it. She dodged quicker, firing the flare high as she dove toward the ground. She didn’t even hear it go off before the next alert came in. And the next and the next.

Fareeha dove and weaved and rolled through the sky like a falcon. She soared high to lead the missiles on. Her flares popped off before she turned her thrusters off. She couldn't help but laugh as she plummeted like a stone. The adrenaline rushed through her body. It shouldn't be fun, she could die at any moment, but it was still exhilarating. She spun away from another salvo of attacks before she finally saw her targets. A trio of Bastion units, configured into permanent anti-aircraft fortifications.

She swept in, her own rocket launcher leveled at her targets. The targeting systems built into her helmet helped her line up the shots as she roared past. Two rockets for each omnic on the first pass. The loud booms of the explosions masked the heavy *ka-chunk* as she expelled her empty rocket cartridge. She pulled another one from the storage on her thigh shoved it in. Flares spouted from her back as she moved. The flames burned bright above her like she were an active and mobile volcano. She didn't need to, as it turned out. Two of the Bastions exploded into wreckage. The third tracked her even though its cannon was nothing but fragments.

Fareeha hung in midair, watching as the omnic tried again and again to fire at her. Finally, she aimed and put it out of its misery. If an omnic could feel misery, that was. She was certain they couldn't. Just before the rocket collided, a screeching, distorted signal tore through her helmet. She listed to the side, as she tried to pull her helmet off but it ended as quick as it had started. She panted, looking down at the smoking wreckage, wondering what in the Hell that was. She would have to ask back at the base if anyone else had picked it up. She turned around and set her thrusters to full, shooting across the sky like a bright blue arrow.

Chapter End Notes

And here's my headcanon about Angela and her healing ability. I mentioned this in one of the drabbles I wrote in *The Angel and the Falcon*, but decided to write it out here.

Chapter 3

Angela stretched out languidly across the bed, almost cat-like. She lay face down, her chin propped up on her hands and her eyes closed. Fareeha perched across the backs of her thighs and ran her hands across Angela's back. Her hands were strong and rough, fingers calloused from work and training. She pressed just firmly enough to rub into Angela's stiff and sore muscles, but was careful to avoid the small metal implants around her shoulder blades. There were eight of them, four on each side, each about the size of Fareeha's thumb. She traced a fingertip near the edge of one and Angela squirmed beneath her.

"Careful, Liebling," Angela said in a low murmur.

"I know."

Fareeha remembered the first time she had accidentally touched one of the connector plates. It had been the first time they made love. She wrapped her arms around Angela and dragged her fingers down her back, not knowing they were there. The sensation had nearly sent Angela into spasms. They were connectors for her Valkyrie suit, she had explained. Something about human skin sent a feedback loop of sensation through them. Still, Fareeha had learned that a little bit of teasing could be fun. She ran her nail along the small ridge where flesh met metal and listened to Angela groan.

"I thought you were going to give me a massage, not tease me," Angela said. She glanced back at Fareeha with a pout.

Leaning forward to press her lips to Angela's ear, Fareeha dragged her nails down Angela's side. The slender woman squirmed beneath her. She smiled before giving Angela's earlobe a gentle nip.

"I think I can manage both, ya amar," Fareeha said in a low purr.

Angela squirmed and giggled, pushing herself up against Fareeha until she had room to roll over. Laying on her back, she slipped her arms up around Fareeha's shoulders. Her fingers traced along the lines of bone and muscles that stood out along Fareeha's back, down between her shoulder blades, across her spine and back up again. Fareeha hummed appreciatively before she leaned down and pressed her lips to Angela's. Angela pulled her in close, returning the kiss with a hunger. Fareeha tasted like tea. Her lips were dark and bitter when Angela ran her tongue against them. They parted and Fareeha's own tongue slipped into Angela's mouth, tasting of milk and sugar.

"This isn't very relaxing," Fareeha said when she finally drew back. She smiled and laughed, soft and breathless.

Angela reached up to stroke her fingers across her lover's face. "Leaving me like this certainly won't help."

Fareeha leaned back in close and pressed a line of kisses along Angela's jaw. She trailed down slowly to her neck, breathing in the scent of Angela as she went. Warm and sweet and gentle, like flowers by a window on a sunny day. Fareeha could feel the flush creeping through Angela. It was hot and pink in her pale skin, traveling down to the tops of her breasts. Fareeha followed it, chasing it down her lover's body with kisses. She paused to nibble at Angela's collarbone, covering the light press of teeth with a touch of her tongue to soothe.

Angela's hands moved across Fareeha's back and shoulders. She pressed and gripped, trying to urge Fareeha on while keeping her where she was. When Fareeha took control, Angela struggled with wanting every touch and even more. She wanted Fareeha's mouth on every inch of her all at once. She writhed in pleasure and disappointment as Fareeha moved her way down to her breasts. Warmth lingered on her skin where Fareeha had kissed, only to fade and cool to goosebumps and memories.

Lips wrapped around one of Angela's pink nipples, Fareeha listened to the woman whimper and moan. She whispered encouragement that Fareeha didn't understand. English and German mingled together into lustful nonsense. When her hand slipped down between Angela's thighs, the words stopped completely. Angela whimpered, pleading with half open eyes. When Fareeha's fingers slipped into her the whimpers turned to moans.

Angela arched her back up hard and moved her hips, desperate to press against Fareeha's fingers. They were strong and sure, pressing and stroking where Angela wanted and needed. Any uncertainty Fareeha had in the beginning of their relationship had vanished the moment she memorized her lover's body. She coaxed and teased, drawing it out as long as she dared before finally pushing Angela over the edge. Hearing Angela cry out her name was Fareeha's favorite part.

Afterward, they lay together in a tangle of limbs. Fareeha nestled her head against Angela's shoulders, breathing in their scents. Heady sex and the sharp tang of sweat. Sweet flowers and bitter tea. Angela's hand stroked through her hair soothingly, letting the long dark strands slip through her fingers like water. Fareeha's eyes kept fluttering shut only to snap back open before she drifted off. She could fall asleep at a moment's notice even without being as content as she was then. Satisfied and happy, it was all but a certainty.

"When do you have to go back?" Fareeha said, trying to fend off a yawn.

"Soon. The worst cases are stable now, but I don't like being away for long."

"You'll work yourself to death, ya amar."

"So says the woman flying off to fight Omnic's every evening."

Fareeha had no response to that. It was true. Ever since their first day here, the attacks had come regularly. Each night as the sun set, a cluster of bastion units would make their way through the snow toward the city. The first group had been small and easily destroyed, but each night they grew in number. Last night they had escorted a spider tank. That had caught Fareeha off guard and a shot had cracked the metal plate on her thigh. Each time they had shrieked out a staticky signal across the radio. No one could decipher it but they all agreed it was likely calling more Omnic's to their location.

She glanced out the window. There were a few hours still before they would attack again. The first few days had been nerve wracking. Everyone stood ready for a new attack as the hours crept by. A week and a half had set the pattern, giving them time to recover and prepare. Fareeha watched fat shimmering snowflakes twist around in the air outside. It was supposed to snow heavily tonight and she was dreading it.

Angela disentangled herself from Fareeha, kissing her on the head before she drew away completely. As she slipped off to shower, Fareeha stretched out across the bed. Her arms wrapped around Angela's pillow and pulled it in close to cuddle with. It smelled like Angela. Flowers and warmth and sweetness all mixed together. Breathing in the scent, Fareeha was asleep before Angela even made it to the bathroom.

The noise was high pitched and distant, but Fareeha's eyes snapped open immediately. She was a soldier first and foremost and the years of training that let her sleep at a moment's notice let her wake up alert. It was a siren. She threw herself out of bed, pulling her clothes on as the siren nearest to her building took up the call. She glanced at the clock, worried for a moment that she had slept too long, but she still had hours before the Omnics were expected.

She pulled her coat on as she left the building, the cold air biting at her skin. She did her best to ignore it, though she hissed out a breath between her teeth at the pain. It misted in the air as she waved down a passing truck. Thankfully, even with her daily sweeps the transports were staying low to the ground for fear of anti-air batteries. She'd never make any time through the snow that was piling up along the street. She shoved in next to a soldier and tried not to shiver too badly. The others were silent as they drove on, staring at the passing buildings and rubble with uncertain eyes. She wrapped her arms around her middle, feeling colder than she had outside.

The forward operations were swarming with soldiers. Men and women scattered in every direction as they gathered supplies and prepared for whatever was coming. Fareeha glimpsed Angela from across the yard, already suited up in her Valkyrie gear. She was shining in white and copper, the wings folded back behind her out of the way and turned off. She leaned on her Caduceus staff as she talked with a few people Fareeha recognized as nurses and doctors. She glanced over as Fareeha clambered out of the truck but didn't make any motion to come to her. She had more important things to do, as did Fareeha. She took off toward the small warehouse.

Her Raptora suit hung up on its frame, the limbs held together on hooks. The young man and woman she had trained since their arrival were already waiting, looking nervous. She offered them a reassuring smile but neither responded in kind. They helped her suit up in tense silence, stepping back as she cycled through the boot up sequence. Her visor printed out the information as the systems went online, finally sending a short burst through her jets that lifted her up off her feet momentarily. With them running, she told the system to run exhaust through vents along the armor to keep her and the metal suit warm. She'd never flown it in conditions quite this cold before.

Satisfied that everything was working, she left to join the troops at the front of the compound. The fortifications ran in a curve around the east side of the city, though there were not enough soldiers to man the entire length any longer. The brunt of the Russian forces were still off to the south where the front had shifted, as far as Fareeha understood. There were more to the north trying to flank the Omnics, but that seemed to be more an open secret than common knowledge and no one quite knew what was happening there. Either way, it left them with what they had in terms of people to protect the already devastated city. Glancing back at it as she made her way toward the commanders, she wondered not for the first time why they simply didn't abandon the city. Or why the Omnics even bothered attacking like they did.

She shook the thoughts from her head as she approached a higher up. "What's going on? No one has said anything."

"They've stopped sending scouts, apparently," the man said. He opened his mouth to speak again but his words were washed away by the thundering boom of artillery. He continued once there was a break. "They hid in the storm and are jamming our radar. We have no idea how large the force is but my scouts are coming back terrified."

Fareeha looked out toward the horizon where the storm was approaching. The sun was setting, illuminating the front edge of the clouds but beyond that was nothing but darkness. Around them, the artillery fired another salvo into the snow obscured enemy.

"You will need to move to support weaker positions. You're the only one who can move quick

enough to make a difference. Reinforcements are on the way, but we need to hold,” he told her before he turned and began shouting in Russian.

After that there was nothing left to do but wait. Her suit hummed in idle mode, the engines powered just enough to keep the weight of it off her legs. It also let the heat circulate through to keep her warm. She was apparently warmer than she thought. A patch of snow melted beneath her feet and several technicians stopped by her to warm their hands near the vents on her back. They smiled nervously at her when she caught them, but she just laughed.

The artillery was booming more regularly when Angela finally stopped by to see her. They stood quietly for a few moments, the snow swirling around them. It had grown heavier by the minute, the wind picking it up to drive it sideways at times. Angela was shivering and huddled close to Fareeha for warmth.

“Be careful out there,” she said when the noise finally subsided enough for words.

Fareeha slipped an arm around her and carefully gave her a squeeze. “Of course I’ll be careful.”

“I know you. You always think of yourself second. Protect the innocent and all that, just be sure to protect yourself too.”

“I promise.”

Angela reached up and pushed Fareeha’s visor back. She met Fareeha’s eyes, sky blue to polished brass, and held her gaze for a moment. Finally, she cupped Fareeha’s cheek in her hand and leaned in to kiss her. Soft and sweet, but lingering. Her lips were cool against Fareeha’s own. Fareeha held her gently, pressing her up against the thankfully warm metal of her Raptora suit.

“Just promise you’ll be careful.”

Fareeha touched a metal gloved finger to the Wadjet tattoo beneath her eye. “I am protected. I will be safe, I promise.”

Angela looked unconvinced but finally nodded. She pressed one last quick kiss to Fareeha’s lips before she slipped away. Her wings spread, the orange hard light feathers extending as she pushed herself off the ground and took flight. The snow swirled around her and she vanished.

Fareeha pulled her helmet back down into place and looked back out across the field. She could see the glow, faint and distant and muted by the storm, but it was there and it was crimson. Hundreds, maybe thousands of Omnics marched toward them with bright red lights. Bastions and spider tanks and perhaps worse. Soldiers were lining up along low walls and heavy sandbag embankments, aiming pulse rifles while those on turrets began to unleash barrage after barrage into the approaching ranks. Pharah stepped forward to stand with those forced to wait and watch.

The sun set behind the city, painting the sky a dark red and orange along the horizon. Before them the storm raged and howled, blotting out the night sky. Huge spotlights blinked to life, illuminating the Omnics in harsh white light. Soldiers muttered around her until finally someone shouted a command. She didn’t have to speak the language to understand. As the men and women around her began to fire, Fareeha bent her knees before shoving herself hard off the ground. Her suit roared to life, a sound that sent familiar thudding pulses through her chest. Her nerves unwound as she rose through the air. The sky was where she belonged. Here she could do what she was made to do.

Fareeha skidded to a halt across the ground. It was a mess of mud and snow beneath her feet,

freezing together in the bitter cold. One of her helpers slipped around behind her. She didn't see which one and she didn't much care. They yanked out the spent power cell from its place on her back and rammed the fresh one home with a *clunk*. This was the third one, she thought. She should have one more fully charged, but the others would take at least a day to refill. She shook her head. If it came to that, it wouldn't matter. They couldn't hold out much longer.

A fist pounded on her shoulder and she blinked away the fog that had crept into her mind as she stood there. The Raptora systems were running again, scanning for problems. When she got the go ahead, she turned and rocketed back out to where the fighting was. She'd barely made it to the edge of the command center when she had to unleash a salvo of rockets, adding several new shattered Omnic husks to the collection. Broken and burning metal was piling up, yet the Omnics kept coming.

She let her empty clip drop to the ground and jammed another into her weapon. She soared higher into the night sky and began to pick off spider tanks that got too close to the line of soldiers below. The turrets and soldiers could rip through the bastion units well enough, but the tanks could take decent punishment before going down. Her rockets were the equalizer there and blew gaping holes into the Omnics from above. Her radio crackled to life.

“Осторожно!”

“Уходи оттуда!”

Fareeha shook her head, slowing to a hover. “What? English, I don't--”

“Pharah! Get out of there! Titan!”

She spun in midair, watching in terror as a monstrosity began to materialize in the snow. It walked forward, slow and ponderous. Shaped vaguely like a person, the titan was as tall as an office building, stories and stories of weapons and armor. With the snow, the fatigue, the darkness, she had not seen it coming. Being in the air, she didn't feel its heavy steps on the ground. But when the massive weapon that made up its right hand fired, she felt the thunderous boom in her chest. It drove the breath from her and she dropped down toward the ground before she could catch herself. Behind her, an explosion rocked the city as buildings were turned to rubble.

“What do we do?” she asked.

“Nothing. We cannot stop it, get out of there.”

“No! It hasn't seen me and if we do nothing, it will kill us all! What do we do?”

There was silence for a long moment. Too long. “We need to keep it from moving. We'll aim for it's leg, everything we have. You try and disable the gun.”

“How?”

“The joints are weak! Aim for the joints!”

Fareeha grit her teeth and aimed herself toward the behemoth. The closer she got, the smaller she felt until she realized this is what a mosquito felt like when trying to feed on a human; tiny and unnoticed but easily crushed if not careful. Below her, explosions began to bloom as artillery smashed into the titan's legs and the ground around it. It was already aiming the massive weapon toward what it must have simply seen as pests.

The wind howled around her, the snow rushing past her as she flew around the metal giant. The elbow joint on the Omnic groaned and scraped as it raised the gun for another shot. Fareeha aimed

and fired, rocket after rocket. She dropped empty clips down into the mud and snow far below her until she was out. Smoke rose from the metal where it had scorched and burned in the explosions. It was dented and cracked but still moving.. Her suit began to scream out warnings to her. The Omnic had noticed her, but she couldn't let it hurt anyone else. She hovered in the air, legs apart and elbows pushed backwards.

“Justice.”

She whispered the word, but her suit knew what to do. Panels on her legs and shoulders opened, exposing rows of missiles that had been packed into them. Her thrusters burned harder as they began to launch. Her suit groaned under the pressure of being pushed forward and shoved backward by the salvo. The rockets smashed into the elbow joint of the massive Omnic and blossomed into balls of flame. Beneath the heavy thuds of the explosions, she heard a scream of metal. The arm shudder and dropped, hanging useless as the damaged joint broke under its own strain.

A cheer rose up in Fareeha's throat but was cut short as something punched hard into her side. The metal on her suit groaned but held and she lurched through the air. The panels closed on her suit. Around her, lights blinked and flashed in the sky, spinning through the darkness. The titan had released a swarm of drones, each nearly as large as she was. And they were firing at her. She raised her weapon and pulled the trigger. The empty rocket launcher clicked uselessly and Fareeha swore as she took evasive maneuvers. She plunged downward toward the ground, weaving and twisting through the air.

She curved up before she hit the ground, spinning so she faced upward toward the clouds and the pursuing drones. There were at least a dozen simply focused on her. She raised her left arm and fired the small, emergency concussion rocket tucked into a housing on her forearm. It raced forward and smashed into the lead drone, blowing chunks of metal from it. Two others smashed into each other from the force of the explosion and a third lost control and smashed into the ground. The others kept coming. She twisted back around and flew.

In her ears, the radio chattered louder and louder. She could understand none of it. She panted out requests for help, for someone to pick off her attackers, but no one acknowledge. No one heard her. She raced toward the line of soldiers at the command, a blue streak through the bright spot lights. Someone noticed. Gunfire rang out, the heartbeat thump of the pulse rifles, and behind her the drones burst into flaming shrapnel. She let out a relieved laugh as she angled back up into the dark sky.

“Thank you. Thank you,” she muttered into the radio, though she didn't think anyone would hear her. She paused to listen and she realized the soldiers were cheering. For her? She didn't think so. They never said her name. As she turned, she realized why and she let out a ragged cheer of her own. The reinforcements had finally arrived.

Tanks led the charge across the snowy ground. Their turrets let loose streams of pink tinged light, beams that cut through the bastion units and tanks with ease. Omnic's burned and exploded, tanks driving over the wreckage of them. And then it appeared just as the titan did, materializing in the dark, snowy night like a monster. A Svyatogor.

It was as tall as the titan, though not as bulky and far more humanoid. It strode across the battlefield like a god, crushing Omnic tanks and units beneath its massive feet. Heavy guns belched flame and smoke from its chest before it simply crashed itself into the disabled Omnic titan. Huge metal hands grabbed limbs and tore, wrenching joints apart with screams that sent shivers down Fareeha's spine. Drones swarmed and fired at the Svyatogor, but it seemed not to notice at all.

Fareeha watched in fascination driven by fatigue and relief. They were safe. They'd fought for so long, but now they were safe. The main force had arrived and were washing over the Omnic forces like a wave. The field was a mix of flame and snow as bastion units and spider tanks burned. The titan toppled backwards, crashing into the ground with a massive boom that Fareeha felt in her lungs and made her teeth rattle. She cheered and laughed and didn't see the drone until it smashed into her side.

Her suit screamed out warnings as she plummeted toward the ground. She tried to burn her jets, but only one responded. It sent her spinning and tumbling. The ground and the sky switched places over and over again until she lost track of where she was.

"She's hurt! We have to get to her! She's going to crash!"

Angela. That was Angela. Even as panic pressed hard on her chest and clouded her head, Fareeha knew that voice. She'd promised to come back safe. She promised. She couldn't hurt Angela like that.

"Fareeha! Please, Fareeha! You have to pull up!" Angela was crying.

Ice flooded Fareeha's veins as the adrenaline pumped into her. Pain flared in her side where she'd been shot and the drone had smashed into her. Her head cleared. She took a breath, holding it a moment as she twisted herself as best she could in midair. She let the breath back out as her remaining engine burned quick and stabilized her. She leaned forward, feet toward the ground and watching it race up toward her. She burned her jet hard. It roared and groaned behind her. Her armor protested. Her body protested. Pain flared through her body. The weight and force pressed in on her as she fought against gravity.

The world she could see turned white and gleaming. Snow shimmered beneath her under the glare of the spotlights. Crystalline and perfect in this one patch, untouched by explosions or Omnic. She realized how lucky that was just before the world went black.

Chapter 4

Angela watched Fareeha sleep. There was nothing more she could do. The nanites had done their work and repaired as much damage as they could. Fareeha slept through it all, heavily sedated so she wouldn't move. Angela couldn't risk having her accidentally cause more damage. It had been a long, slow week. She had only left the room when she had to.

The first few days after the attack had been a blur of surgeries and fear. She had dumped as many nanites as she had dared into Fareeha after she had gotten to her. The bleeding stopped quickly after that but there had been so much damage. When the time came for Fareeha's own surgery, the other doctors had stepped in and forced her to sit aside. That was the way of things. No surgeon should operate on a loved one, not unless they had too. Even now, Angela's hands trembled when she thought about it. The chance of making a mistake, of making things worse made her sick to her stomach in a way she had rarely felt before.

Even so, she had raged when the news came back. She had screamed about their failure and their ineptitude. She knew she could have done better and made sure to let them know that. She had torn the room she shared with Fareeha to shreds, smashing dishes and even a chair to matchsticks. As she sat and watched her own wounds heal, the nanites that swarmed through her ever efficient, she realized she was wrong. She couldn't have done better and she knew it.

"I miss you, Liebling," Angela said softly.

She brushed her fingers through Fareeha's hair and brushed it away from her face. Her eyelids fluttered at the touch but didn't open. Angela sighed and leaned forward, laying her head gently on Fareeha's chest. She closed her eyes and listened. She could hear the steady beat of her heart, the hum of air in her lungs, the thrum of blood. She listened to the sounds of life within her beloved and held onto them tightly. Everything would be okay. Everything had to be okay.

The next she knew, a nurse was shaking her awake. She was speaking to Angela haltingly but Angela already knew what she wanted. Some motions and tones of voice were universal, especially in a hospital. She stood and walked to the door, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. The nurse went about giving Fareeha her medication and checking her wounds. She was in good hands, Angela knew that.

Her stomach twisted even so. She didn't like being far from Fareeha but she needed to do more than exist. She knew that. She needed to eat and shower and sleep properly instead of hunched in a chair. She needed to be ready in case something else happened. She knew all this, but her feet still lead her downstairs and out the front of the building. They still took her in her same, familiar circuit around the outside and through the snow. She would do her laps while she waited for the nurse to finish. Then she would crawl back into her chair and wait for Fareeha to wake up.

"Don't you look a damn mess."

Angela stopped in her tracks and spun on her heel. Through the haze of her fatigue, she saw the short man standing at the edge of the street. A few soldiers were unloading heavy crates from the back of a truck behind him.

"Torbjörn. You made it," she said as she walked to him. Despite everything, she broke into a smile as she leaned down to hug him.

He gave her an awkward pat on the shoulder. "Angela," he said with a sniff, "it's great to see you, but you smell awful."

Angela jerked away and took a step back. Her pale cheeks turned a darker shade of pink that had nothing to do with the cold. She reached up and tucked a lock of hair back behind her ear. It was greasy and hung limply against her skin.

“I’m sorry. I’ve been sleeping up next to Fareeha in case she wakes up.”

Torbjörn grunted. “You think she wants to wake up to that?”

“You’re an ass,” she said with a huff. He just looked at her from under his bushy brows until she sighed. “Fine, you’re right. Let’s get you settled first.”

A dozen crates and boxes, copious swearing, and an uncomfortable ride back in a closed and cramped truck found the pair back at the small building where Angela and Fareeha had lived. The men in the truck laughed, chatting among themselves in Russian.

“Know what they’re saying?” Torbjörn said as he followed behind her.

“No and I don’t care to know.”

“You sure? It’s about how badly--”

“You are my friend so you know that I mean it when I say I will knee you in the face if you finish that sentence.”

“Missed you too, Angela,” he said with a chuckle. It gave way to a low whistle as she opened the door. Broken chairs and plates and glasses still were scattered across the apartment. “Busy night, I take it?”

Angela flushed. “There’s food and drinks in the fridge. Help yourself.”

She slipped away to shower, standing under the scalding water for a long time. She let it wash over her, relaxing muscles that had become stiff from cramped sleeping and tense with frustration. She scrubbed until her skin was tender and red. She tried to ignore the twisting feeling of guilt in her chest until her eyes stung with tears. She shut off the water, dried and dressed. She shouldn’t keep Torbjörn waiting so long.

When she walked back into the living room, she realized she shouldn’t have worried. He had cleaned up the debris she had left behind. The table and remaining chairs had been neatly arranged. Torbjörn sat at the kitchen counter with a cup of coffee. When he saw her, he poured one for her. It was dark as sin, rich and bitter and hot as it ran down her throat. Exactly how she liked it.

“Thanks. Fareeha doesn’t appreciate my taste in coffee,” she said between sips. “She likes it lighter and only a little bit a day. You should have seen her face the first time I poured her entire pot of coffee into my thermos.”

She glanced at Torbjörn, but he said nothing. He sipped his coffee and looked up at her from beneath the forests that made up his thick eyebrows.

“That isn’t where the table was before,” she said, looking away from him.

“It looks better there,” he said, setting his cup down. “You called me halfway across the world, Angela. Are you going to talk about it or not?”

“About it?”

“Or her, if you prefer.”

She chewed her bottom lip, looking out the window at the snow that drifted past. He reached over and placed his hand on her wrist. His prosthetic hand. He had switched out the appendage for one more humanoid than the heavy grasper he used for work. It was warm from holding his cup of coffee, but still not the same as flesh. It was hard and rigid against her soft skin. The world began to waver in front of her as tears welled up and stung her eyes. They began to fall down her cheeks as the words tumbled from her mouth.

He didn't stop her as she spoke. He sat quietly and listened, eyes never leaving her face. She would glance down into them only to feel a fresh wave of tears start. She told him about the fight, the death, the destruction. The miracles Fareeha had pulled off and the miracle she herself wasn't able to. When she was done, he gave her arm a squeeze and poured her a fresh cup of coffee.

“Sounds to me like she's a hero. She saved a lot of lives,” he said, his voice gruff but softer. “You should be proud of her.”

“I am. I am so proud of her, Torbjörn. She did so incredible out there.”

“But you don't think you did.”

“I couldn't fix her.”

“You know your limits. You always have.”

“But it's different this time!”

He sighed and moved his hand from her arm. “Why's that?” he asked, though he sounded like he already knew the answer.

“I love her,” she said quietly as she stared down into her drink.

“So, because you love her, you should've been able to do the impossible?”

“I don't know. But I feel like I should have done something more.”

“Angela, what else could you have done?” When she didn't answer, he shook his head and sighed. “Nothing. And you know it. But now you can do something for her. She's going to need your help. I've been where she is and it can be tough.”

Angela chewed her bottom lip for a moment. “I think I should go back now. I want to be there when she wakes up.”

“A good plan.”

“You can stay here, if you like.”

Torbjörn drained the last of his mug and shook his head. “Nah, I want to see how close they'll let me to that titan.”

“Just try not to get arrested. I can't bail you out of military custody this time,” she said, furrowing her brows.

He gave a noncommittal shrug and hopped off his stool. With a sigh, she followed him, wrapping herself back into her coat before they slipped back out into the snow. Her stomach twisted in knots as they rode back to the hospital. Torbjörn was right that Fareeha would need help. She'd have to

adjust and that would take time. Angela simply hoped that she would be good enough.

Angela clumsily tried to put Fareeha's beads back into her hair. They'd talked about this once and Fareeha even showed Angela how to do it. It turned out that this was one thing her clever, nimble fingers were actually pretty stupid at. As soon as Fareeha had moved, the beads had clattered across the floor. Angela went hunting for them while Fareeha had laughed. Angela hoped she would laugh this time, but she didn't think it was likely.

"Wake up soon, Fareeha," she said as she finished. She smoothed Fareeha's hair away from her face. "There are people here who want to see you. Torbjörn is here. The soldiers want to thank you for all you've done. Just wake up and you'll see."

Fareeha's eyes fluttered and Angela sat down, her breath catching in her throat. She slipped her hand into Fareeha's, giving her fingers a gentle squeeze. Moments passed achingly slow as Angela waited until Fareeha's fingers tightened back. Her dark eyes opened slowly, squinting against the light in the room. She turned her head to look at Angela, her gaze dull with so much sleep and heavy medication. Angela watched the light creep back into them as Fareeha recognized her.

"Ya amar," she said, her voice quiet and rough, cracking with lack of use. She tried to push herself up on her elbow but her body twisted to the left and she fell back down against the bed.

Fareeha's eyes wandered over the heavily bandaged stump that her left arm ended in just below her shoulder. She pulled her hand away from Angela's to touch the rounded amputation, wincing when she did so.

"What happened to my arm?" she said, not looking at Angela.

Angela cleared her throat softly. "When you fell, your suit crushed in and...your arm...we tried, Fareeha. We tried so hard to save it. I'm so sorry."

Fareeha pushed herself up again, this time more carefully, until she sat up against the pillows behind her. Angela watched the emotions run across her face. Tears welled up in Fareeha's eyes, but Angela pretended not to notice and looked away.

"I'm thirsty," she said hoarsely.

Angela stood and went to fill a glass of water, letting Fareeha wipe away her tears and compose herself. She got a weak, wavering smile when she returned with it.

"Thank you," Fareeha said before taking a sip. "How many people did we lose?"

Angela shook her head. "Not as many as we could have, thanks to you. You're a hero to them now, I think. They kept trying to leave stuff for you, mostly alcohol until I told them you didn't drink."

"Maybe I should start. It'd be rude not to, right?" Fareeha said with a small chuckle. "A hero. Who would have thought I'd be a hero for crashing into the ground."

"You're a hero for saving them."

Fareeha started to say something but stopped herself. She let out a sigh before she looked over at Angela. "Do you think they'll put me on posters?"

“Maybe, but they’ll never be as inspiring as the real thing.”

Fareeha reached over and stroked her hand gently against Angela’s face. Angela caught her wrist and turned her head, softly nuzzling her nose against Fareeha’s fingers and kissing the rough palm of her hand.

“I’m still tired,” Fareeha said after a moment. “Stay with me?”

“Always. How could I leave?”

Angela took the glass of water away and set it aside. Fareeha held her arm out, open and inviting. Angela slipped into the bed, curling up close against her lover. She laid her head on Fareeha’s chest, listening to the steady rhythm of her breathing and the thump of her heart as she drifted off.

Angela felt the weight of the past week pressing down on her. She’d barely slept, barely eaten, barely moved. In the embrace of Fareeha, of the woman she loved, her nerves slowly unraveled. She watched the snow drift outside the window for a while longer until her eyes slowly slipped shut. She slept deeply and soundly next to Fareeha, the place she was meant to be.

“Sorry this is the reason we end up seeing each other again,” Torbjörn said as he sat down at the table. He placed a display tablet in front of her and started opening up files.

Fareeha smiled at him. It was a small smile tinged with sadness but it was a smile all the same. She was glad to see him, but he was right. She could have thought of a million different and better reasons she wanted to see him. Sitting in a wheelchair in a hospital after losing her arm was certainly near the very bottom.

“I’m glad you came,” she said.

“Angela told me our little Fareeha might need help. How could I say no to that?”

That managed to make her laugh, even if just briefly. “I haven’t been ‘little Fareeha’ for twenty years now.”

“Ah, well, you didn’t ever stop. At least to some of us. Angela might see you different now, but to us old timers you’re still that little girl we all wanted to protect. Well, at least to those of us left,” he said. His voice had grown thicker with emotion and he cleared his throat, shaking it off. “But enough about that. I wanted to show you the design I had.”

He brought it up on his tablet and showed her. Fareeha stared at it for a long few moments, unblinking and silent. It was an arm or at least the facsimile of one. Metal and carbon fiber colored blue and white and gray. Narrower than her real arm had been since it didn’t need flesh or muscle. It was thinner at the wrist and elbow, thicker where it would connect to the remains of her arm. She closed her eyes and sighed.

“Do you not--” Torbjörn began.

“No. I mean, it is a good design. I like it just fine.” She kept her eyes closed as she felt the tears began to well up again.

“Talk to me, Fareeha.”

“What’s it like?” she asked quietly as she wiped her hand across her eyes.

Torbjörn let out a slow breath and scratched at his beard for a moment. “It’s difficult,” he said finally and Fareeha deflated visibly. “You lost a part of yourself. You’ll miss it, be angry that you did or sad that you did or both at once. You’ll blame yourself. You’ll hear the same comments over and over from those around you.”

He takes the tablet from her and closed the picture before reaching over to her. His metal hand laid on her arm, heavy and cool against her skin. She looked down at it a moment before looking over at him.

“They’ll say you lost it doing something noble and good, but that doesn’t make it better. You can be proud of what you did and still be upset at your own loss. Don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t be,” he continued, looking up at her. “But it will get better in time. Eventually, with luck, you’ll feel like this new prosthetic is your own. Angela and I will do everything we can to make this easier on you.”

Fareeha leaned down and wrapped her arm around the shorter man, hugging him as tightly as she was able. He chuckled softly and returned the embrace. She hadn’t hugged him in decades, not since she ran off to join the military, but he still smelled of oil and metal. It was familiar, just like the way his beard scratched at her bare skin was familiar.

“You’ll get through this. You’re strong, just like your mother. And you’ve got someone who loves you by your side,” he said when she finally drew back.

“Loves me? You must be hearing things I haven’t.”

“Ah, well, in that case, try not to mention it,” he said as he rubbed the back of his neck.

“Thank you for this. For the help.”

“As I said, how could I say no to our little Fareeha?”

She chuckled softly as she sat back in her seat. Outside the window, the snow had finally stopped. The sky was dark with clouds still, but the sun peeked through gaps, straining to make itself known again. Ice and snow flashed like crystal. She could hear shouts and cries and laughter. She heard the rumble of trucks. Next to her, Torbjörn muttered to himself as he made notes on his tablet.

Fareeha closed her eyes and let the world wash over her. A smile played at the corner of her lips and she let out a quiet breath. She felt as if the stone had been lifted from her chest, the pressure and worry that had collected since she woke up. It wasn’t gone, she knew. It hovered over her, waiting to drop and drive her back down, but for now she had some relief. Things would be alright.

Chapter 5

The arm was too heavy. No, that wasn't right. It was *her* arm, not *the* arm. Her arm was too heavy. It hung from her body like dead weight. The remaining stump of Fareeha's arm disappeared into it, brown into dark blue metal that now made up her elbow. Straps held it in place, running up to her shoulder and then across her back to loop under her right arm. It was supposed to distribute the weight too, but it didn't seem to make much difference. The harness was the best they could do right now. Torbjörn promised a more permanent solution when they got the chance, if she desired it.

This was the third iteration of the prosthetic in as many weeks. She wasn't sure how Torbjörn worked so fast on them, but each time she found an issue with it, he took it back for work. She assumed he had somehow conscripted a few of the soldiers into working for him. Each time the arm came back, it was more sensitive and worked better. But it was never lighter. Well, he said it was lighter but she couldn't tell.

"It'll take time," he told her, "but you'll get used to it."

And she was, if slowly. She always prided herself on being a quick learner, but this was such a huge change that even great strides felt like hobbled steps. Sure, the first steps of a marathon were important, but there was so much more beyond that.

Her second surgery had gone well. Against the advice of the other doctors in the makeshift hospital, Angela had performed it herself. None of the other doctors were as qualified and neither she nor Fareeha wanted to transport back to a major city to find someone who could do it. It had been uneventful, according to Angela, and healed quickly thanks to her nanomachines. The connection points had been attached to her nerves and left exposed at the end of her arm. They were similar to the ones Angela had on her back. And, like those ones, the reacted strongly to touch. The first time she accidentally brushed her fingers against them, Fareeha had all but collapsed on the floor.

They let her connect to the prosthetic, which made them worth the inconvenience. With them, she could bend her arm and open her fingers. It was difficult. Her body wanted to do things in a way that no longer worked. Her brain too. Even when she looked at her new metallic hand, her brain insisted on trying to move fingers that weren't there. That sometimes hurt and sent weird sensations through her arm, like bugs under her skin with sharp needles for feet. It happened less often now, at least during the more routine exercises. When she tried to learn something new, though, it often ended in tears.

"It'll get easier," Torbjörn told her. "You just have to keep practicing."

She kept practicing. She spent hours and hours on simple exercises. When she couldn't sleep, itself a new and troubling development, she would sit awake in the living room and practice. Each finger got its time to shine as she worked to move them individually. It was always a struggle at first to do it, but in a way it was like limbering up a stiff muscle. The more she did it, the easier it got. Then the next day it would be stiff again, but not quite as bad. So she would work slowly and steadily to retrain herself for the day.

There were other problems. The arm was stronger and her control over it was rough still. She'd shattered a dozen glasses and plates with an accidental twitch that made her squeeze down too hard. Torbjörn said that would come in time and also with better calibrations. He was doing what he could for her, but he said they might need instruments he didn't have access to. She could manage though, if she was careful enough.

Worse was the lack of sensory input. Pressure was there, for the most part. She could tell how hard she was squeezing, despite her accidents. Temperature was there too, though only to send sharp pains up her actual flesh and blood arm should she grab something too hot or cold. This way she wouldn't accidentally think something was okay to touch with her skin, in theory. But what she didn't feel anymore was the texture of objects. She couldn't tell if something was smooth or rough or furry. She couldn't feel the bumps on old metal tables or the grain of the wood on doorframes.

"That won't get any better," Torbjörn told her.

She cried that night. She hadn't meant to. She brushed her fingers through Angela's hair while the doctor slept next to her and couldn't feel it against the metal and carbon of her fingertips. Her breath caught in her throat and she stumbled out of bed toward the living room, not wanting to wake Angela. With the blood pounding in her ears already and her vision blurring, she didn't realize how loud she was already being.

Angela's hands slipped around her shoulders not long after Fareeha found her way to the couch and the sobs burst from her lips. Angela wrapped herself around Fareeha from behind, pressed up against her tightly. She didn't say anything. Fareeha was glad for that. When the pain in her chest subsided, the sense of loss dulled, they laid on the couch and slept entwined together.

She didn't press the issue the next morning and Fareeha was quietly grateful for that as well. It was difficult to put into words the things she felt these days and Angela didn't really understand. She had admitted as much already, frustrated with her inability to comfort Fareeha. That had passed quickly, though. Fareeha didn't need her to understand or relate to the problems.

She simply needed someone to be close and soothe and hold her. Someone to love her no matter what and make her smile when she was frustrated. Someone who would help clean up the tea when she broke another cup and give her a kiss afterwards to help the embarrassment go away. Angela could do and did all of these.

For someone who could relate, she had Torbjörn. He let her scream and rage when she needed to, her voice and anger contained in the small workshop he had commandeered. When she calmed down, he would tell her stories as he worked. He had been where she was, but with much worse options. She chewed on the inside of her cheeks, holding back the laughter as he told her about faulty prosthetics he'd endured. A hand that had locked into a rude gesture in the middle of an important meeting. A claw that acted like a possessed crab pincer. The one time he was motioning and the bolts in his wrist failed, launching his hand across Angela's lab and into her expensive test equipment. He'd look at her and raise the thickets that made up his eyebrows, eyes gleaming beneath them and Fareeha would lose it.

"It gets easier."

He'd take her hand in his, her prosthetic one, and squeeze. She could feel the pressure of his tough but not the actual feel of his skin. She knew his hand was rough, though. It had always been coarse and calloused. That's how it always was, even back when he'd ruffle her hair as a kid. Back when they were the same height. She'd carefully close her hand around his and squeeze back, feeling her anxiety melt away. It would get easier.

"Why did we come here?" Fareeha asked.

Angela looked up from the cup of soup she was sipping from, blinking her way out of her own

thoughts. “To help people, of course.”

“Did we?”

“Help people?” Angela said as she shifted in her seat. “Of course we did.”

It had been a long day for them both, though for vastly different reasons. Angela had been in surgery much of the day after several trucks full of wounded came in. Fareeha, on the other hand, had spent all day trying to function in her Raptora suit with her new arm. She’d assumed it would be easy, but her balance had been thrown off just enough to cause problems. After the third crash, Torbjörn had chased her off and took the suit back for repairs.

“It doesn’t feel like I did,” Fareeha said quietly. “I got myself hurt and it was my fault we got attacked anyway.”

Angela set her soup down and walked over to Fareeha, slipping into her lap. She nestled in close, laying her head on Fareeha’s shoulder. When Fareeha wrapped her arms around her, Angela began to run her fingers along the forearm of her prosthetic. Watching her, Fareeha could imagine the way it felt.

“It wasn’t your fault. You did everything you could to help,” Angela said softly. She nuzzled in close against Fareeha’s neck, breathing in the mixed scent of skin and soap. “You made things easier for the people here. Without you, they’d have not gotten the shipments they needed. Without you, there’d have been so many more hurt when that thing showed up.”

“I just wonder.”

“If you’re doing good?”

Fareeha chewed her lip before nodding.

“You are. You came here to help and you’ve done just that. You’ve even given a part of yourself to save people here,” Angela said as she snuggled in closer. “Your mother would be proud.”

Angela felt Fareeha tense beneath her. She drew back and looked up at her with a small frown. Her mother was a weirdly touchy subject. Sometimes she seemed perfectly happy to talk about her, but other times it seemed like pressing on an open wound. Angela shook her head.

“Well, it may not matter for much longer,” she said, changing the subject. She traced an idle pattern across the smooth metal of Fareeha’s arm.

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t think they’re going to let us stay here much longer.”

Fareeha furrowed her brows in confusion. “Why not? Did we do something wrong?”

“No, you didn’t do anything wrong,” Angela said. She brought a hand up to stroke Fareeha’s cheek softly. “And I didn’t either, but it is my fault. My ties to Overwatch make me a liability in some ways.”

“How?”

“What I’m doing here might be deemed illegal if they think I’m acting in the sake of Overwatch. It’s not likely to happen, but it wouldn’t be the first time someone simply decided to think it safer if I was gone. And with everything that happened when Overwatch fell, sometimes people think

that maybe I could have had something to do with it. We're all under suspicion."

"But we're helping them."

Angela sighed. "We're only two people who can only do so much, at least in their eyes. We're not here with them, we're not under their command or control. We're not even mercenaries, really. I expected this to happen, really, I just thought it would take longer."

Fareeha wrapped her arms around Angela and squeezed her gently. She turned her head to bury her face in that yellow hair, inhaling the scent of flowers. Angela smiled at the affection and closed her eyes.

"This is almost what it was like," Angela said. "Back when things were good, after the Crisis. We'd fly to where people needed us, give the help we could, and then leave again. We knew we couldn't solve all problems perfectly. We didn't have the resources and we couldn't have worked as a military. We never should have, though they tried in the end. But sometimes, nudging things in the right direction was enough. Providing security for food convoys or medical teams. Rescuing people after an attack. That was what we were good at."

"Do you miss it?" Fareeha asked as she shifted beneath Angela. She slowly stretched herself down on the couch, pulling Angela along with her and cuddling up close.

"I don't know," Angela said as she nuzzled into the hollow of Fareeha's throat. "I miss the good that we were capable of. I miss that we could bring hope and security to people in need. I don't miss what we became, though."

"I think we could be that. You and me, something for good."

"I'd like that. We could--Fareeha!"

Angela squeaked in surprise as Fareeha's hand found its way to her backside and gave a squeeze. It was her prosthetic one, since Angela could feel the warmth of her real one at the small of her back.

"What?"

"You know exactly what! We were having a moment and you decided that was the appropriate moment to grab my butt!"

Fareeha pursed her lips as she tried not to laugh. "It slipped. My hand slipped."

"Right onto my butt?"

"A tragic accident."

"Your hand or my butt?" Angela said. She looked up at Fareeha, doing her best not to smile. Her blue eyes glittered playfully.

"Well..."

Angela swatted Fareeha's shoulder. "There is no pause there! Don't you dare consider saying my butt!"

Fareeha giggled and Angela's heart melted. It was light and clear and truly the first happy sound Fareeha had made since the accident. Angela bit her lip to try and hold back the sudden tears of relief that sprang up in her eyes.

“Well, I’m still trying to practice my fine motor skills,” Fareeha said.

“Oh? And you thought you’d practice them on me?”

Fareeha smirked. “That seemed like the most fun way.”

“Hm, as a doctor, I should encourage your rehabilitation,” Angela said thoughtfully. “Just don’t be too rough.”

“When am I ever?”

“That’s right,” Angela said with a laugh. She put her hands on Fareeha’s shoulders and pushed her onto her back. Angela moved over her and straddled her waist. “You aren’t. My delicate Fareeha.”

Angela watched the familiar blush creep up into Fareeha’s cheeks and then spread down to her neck. She leaned down, kissing a path across that blush toward Fareeha’s collarbone. She felt her lover tremble beneath her touches and let out a soft sigh. This was likely their last night in the city. She hadn’t mentioned that and she wouldn’t now. They could deal with it in the morning. A happy and content Fareeha was the more important thing right now. When she felt Fareeha’s hand slip under her shirt, one warm and one still cool, Angela stopped worrying too.

It had started snowing again in the night. Drifts of it shimmered in the morning light, undisturbed but for the few paths people had cut through it to walk. Fareeha wouldn’t miss it, she decided. Maybe if she had had a chance to have more fun with it, it’d be different. She knew people had snowball fights, built forts, and all sorts of things in the snow. All it had done for her was be an icy, freezing nightmare though. She nudged a lump of it off the step with her boot, away from herself.

“You going to say goodbye or just stand up there looking like a stuffed toy?” Torbjörn said, his hands on his hips.

“If I stand perfectly still, I don’t have to worry about moving,” she said, her voice muffled through her scarf. She’d clad herself in every bit of cold weather clothing she had before they left the apartment. A hat, a scarf, three shirts, a sweater, her coat, a pair of gloves, and thick boots made her look rather overstuffed and round.

She stepped carefully down the slick steps and leaned down to hug him. She squeezed him tight and he gently patted her back. She breathed in the smell of metal and oil that he always carried, feeling a pang of nostalgia and regret.

“Thank you for everything,” she told him quietly, trying to keep the quiver from it. She’d never been particularly good with goodbyes. “I’m sorry we’re leaving you here alone.”

“Bah, they’ll chase me out soon too. Right after they finish getting all the information they want out of me,” he muttered as he drew back. He glanced down the road toward the camp and the massive husk of the titan he’d been helping to disassemble.

“Maybe we’ll see you again soon then?”

“Hm. Maybe, but probably not for a bit unless you do something stupid to your arm. Speaking of, try and get some place to do better calibrations on it. Call in a favor with HSI if you got one.”

“I’ll try to do that,” Fareeha said as she stood back up straight.

“I need to get back. And looks like your girlfriend is waiting for you,” he said.

There was a smirk hidden in the depths of his beard, Fareeha knew. And she knew it was because she blushed. Even though he couldn't see it, he knew she did somehow. She glanced back over her shoulder to see Angela quietly motioning for her to come inside.

“Seems like she is,” Fareeha said. “You stay safe here, yes?”

“Advice from the woman who fell out of the sky?” he teased her. “I'll be fine. You do the same. And keep Angela safe.”

“I would never let her get hurt.”

“I know,” Torbjörn said as he turned and walked back to the car that was waiting for him.

Fareeha watched him climb into the back seat before she turned and picked her way carefully back up the stairs. She wavered at the top, her foot slipping in the snow. Angela grabbed her arm and pulled her into safety before leading her inside.

“They're getting ready to start boarding people,” Angela said, glancing across the station.

There was a single train waiting and being offloaded. Stacks of crates and trunks and boxes of all sorts stood nearby. Angela had managed to drag their departure out to three days instead of immediately. It was enough time to make sure her patients were stable and could manage without her and enough time to make sure Fareeha's Raptora suit was functional, but they both wished for more. Angela was sick with worry for the patients she was leaving behind. Fareeha simply wanted to do more to help. The higher ups in the ranks had been insistent, though. There was no more delaying.

“I hope the soldiers don't think we're abandoning them,” Fareeha said as they walked across the station.

“I don't think they do. They're disappointed, but I think they know it wasn't our decision,” Angela said.

Fareeha wasn't so sure. She'd spent the past two nights with the troops. She'd eaten with them and sat at the bar with them while they drank. They toasted her and what she had done for them. They toasted their Angel Doctor repeatedly. But there was a current of disappointment underneath it all. Fareeha had done her best to explain and tell them that they wanted to stay, but there was nothing anyone could do.

Angela squeezed Fareeha's arm. “Don't dwell on it, Liebling. This isn't the end of things. There are more people to help.”

“I know,” she said before shrugging off the subject. “So where do we go next?”

“I'm not sure yet. Maybe home for a bit.”

“Whose home?”

“Well, I was thinking mine,” Angela said. “I think you'd love Zürich.”

“It's cold there too, right?”

“Well, it can be.”

Fareeha shivered. "I think we should stop by Giza before we go back to some place frozen. To thaw out a bit."

"It's not that bad!" Angela said with a laugh. "I promise you won't turn into an ice cube there."

"Still, I think there are some things I need to do back home first. Please?"

Angela looked up at her as they paused by the doors to the boarding platform. Fareeha smiled, slipping her gloved hand into Angela's and giving a squeeze. Finally, Angela nodded and squeezed back.

"Alright, we can stop in Egypt."

"Thank you, ya hayati. I promise it'll be worth it."

Reaching up, Angela hooked a finger in Fareeha's scarf and tugged it down off her face. She leaned up and pressed a soft kiss to her lips, letting it linger as Fareeha slipped her arms around Angela's waist. They stood there for a few moments, embraced and oblivious to the world around them. Angela let out a small, content sigh when she finally drew back.

"Fareeha, so long as you're with me, everything is worth it."

The door opened and a man leaned in, motioning for them to follow. They boarded the train, finding their seats in an empty car. It was warm enough for Fareeha to strip off her jacket and sweater, piling them up with her scarf and hat and gloves in the seat across from her. Angela curled up next to her, leaning in and almost immediately falling asleep. She barely slept the night before, even when Fareeha dragged her to bed on three separate occasions.

Angela stirred and muttered in her sleep and Fareeha tightened her arm around her. It was her prosthetic and it rested heavily across Angela's shoulders, but she never seemed to mind. It seemed to Fareeha that she found the extra weight more comforting. It was a small thing, but it made Fareeha feel just a little less uncertain.

She watched out the window as the train pulled away from the station. She watched the city, frosted in snow, slowly turn into fields of ice and snow. They were broken up by forests and lakes and rivers the further away they got. Out here it was still so peaceful. She knew it would stay that way the further they got from Krasnoyarsk. It sometimes surprised her how beautiful and calm things could be only a dozen miles away from a war zone.

She hoped the war wouldn't spread this far. She hoped that not many more people would get hurt. She hoped they would push the Omnic's back and retake their homes. She hoped and hoped because that was all she could do. Fareeha sighed softly, slumping into her seat. Angela could say they were supposed to be beacons. They were the ones supposed to inspire hope. But who was supposed to do that for them?

Angela muttered again, twisting to lean herself against Fareeha. Her eyes fluttered open and Fareeha offered a small smile.

"You're tense," Angela muttered as she reached up to touch Fareeha's cheek. "It'll be alright. I promise."

She yawned and stretched out across the seats, laying her head in Fareeha's lap. Fareeha reached down and stroked her hand lightly along Angela's side, feeling her the rise and fall of her chest beneath her touch. Fareeha felt the ball of stress that had been forming in her chest loosen somewhat. She couldn't help but trust in the petite doctor that was currently snoring softly in her lap. She looked back out the window to watch a forest blur past as the train reached full speed.

And she smiled. Everything would be alright.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!